

ECHOES OF THE ANTIQUE: THE EGYPTIAN REVIVAL IN AMERICAN SILVER,
1840-1900

by

Carley C. Altenburger
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to three professors who have had a profound impact on my life and future. First, Jean Christine Altenburger, Professor Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh, and more importantly my great aunt and a personality of immense proportions. She has supported me at every turn in my educational life, making sure that no opportunity needed to be missed. Second, to Dr. Tammy Krygier, without whose enthusiasm and knowledge I would never have known about ancient Egyptian history to the extent needed to research and write this thesis. Third, to Jennifer Goldsborough who through her immense knowledge of all things decorative arts and her drive for students to achieve excellence gave me the confidence to meld Egyptian history with the study of American silver. Her steadfast patience, support, and encouragement through the writing of this paper has been invaluable. Finally, and most importantly, to my mother Gail M. Altenburger. Without her unending help, support, and encouragement, this undertaking truly would not have been possible. There are not enough words to thank you for all you have done to help me complete this project.

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ABSTRACT

ECHOES OF THE ANTIQUE: THE EGYPTIAN REVIVAL IN AMERICAN SILVER,
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American silver design, like most design, does not exist in a vacuum. It is a reflection of the culture and society that creates it. Throughout the nineteenth century there was an explosion of designs that “revived” past styles, such as the rococo, or drew inspiration from foreign cultures, such as the Japonese. One of the many “revival” styles that came to the fore around mid-century was Egyptian-style design, commonly referred to as Egyptian revival. The rediscovery of Egypt, and the subsequent birth of Egyptology in the mid-nineteenth century, had a far greater impact on American silver design than is generally recognized by current scholarship.

The term “Egyptian revival” seems to have its origins in architectural history. In architectural terms, the use of ancient Egyptian design truly was a revival; architects and designers did base “new” designs on extant ancient Egyptian architecture. They did, in fact, revive elements used in ancient architecture. But the same cannot be said for silver.

Unlike architecture, there is no ancient precedent in silver form for modern silversmiths and designers to emulate; therefore in the medium of silver, it should more accurately be termed “Egyptian-style,” indicating that the designs have ancient Egyptian origins but were not found in ancient Egyptian silverwork.

The concept of the Egyptian-style which appeared in American silver during the nineteenth century was not new; it had existed as a design style in silver, mainly in Europe, since Napoleon’s 1798 invasion of Egypt. However, in America the surge in Egyptian-style design at mid-century was unique in that it was more a result of a growing interest in ancient Egypt which would become known as Egyptomania.

Nineteenth century Egyptomania grew as a result of a European presence in Egypt, which quickly made it a popular location to visit, as well as study. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of Egyptology as a field of study, which attempted to understand ancient Egyptian art and culture. As works were published by scholars describing the artwork and designs of ancient Egypt, they were picked up by designers and were incorporated into the repertoire that comprised the aesthetic movement.

While the Egyptian-style did not become a predominate style in American silver design, it did gain and still retains an important place amongst the myriad of aesthetic movement styles and is frequently seen incorporated into pieces reflecting the design reform movement.

The study of Egyptian-style American silver has largely been neglected by scholars. While the study of other forms of eclecticism and revivalism in silver have been

discussed extensively, most notably Japonisme and the rococo revival, the Egyptian-style design in silver has been reduced to a footnote in the design history as it pertains to American silver. The most notable discussion of the topic is found in *Silver in America 1840-1940: A Century of Splendor* by Charles L. Venable, who proposed that the Egyptian “revival” in the decorative arts may have been sparked by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1870, and that American Egyptian “revival” design was based on European examples. This explanation leaves a rich source of understanding unexplored, namely the cultural changes which led to the scientific study of Egypt during the nineteenth century and subsequent cultural/artistic interest in the findings as they were published by scholars.

This document discusses the origins of the Egyptian-style designs highlighting the many origins found outside of pattern books of designers, such as Owen Jones’ *Grammar of Ornament*; and provides other motivations for the appearance of Egyptian-style design elements in silver. It will provide a greater understanding of the Egyptian-style, its presence in the American silver of the nineteenth century, and its connection with the aesthetic movement through an examination of the growth of interest in Egyptian-style design in nineteenth century American silver. It will provide sources available to American silver designers in the nineteenth century, such as; contemporary literature, the cultural and design environment, and illustration of how the Egyptian-style was manifested in American silver through comparison of existing pieces and design drawings done during the study of ancient artifacts.

This thesis will argue that American silver in the Egyptian-style design was influenced not just by the works of contemporary designers such as Owen Jones or Christopher Dresser, and notable events like the opening of the Suez Cannel. It was also heavily influenced by the “opening” of Egypt to the West which resulted in the publications by notable early Egyptologists such as Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, and many others; and an increased popular interest in ethnography by scholars and the public.

CHAPTER ONE

“It may be said of some very old places, as of some very old books, that they are destined to be forever new. The nearer we approach them, the more remote they seem; the more we study them, the more we have yet to learn. Time augments rather than diminishes their everlasting novelty; and to our descendants of a thousand years hence it may safely be predicted that they will be even more fascinating than ourselves. This is true of many ancient lands, but of no place is it so true as of Egypt...the interest never flags – the subject never palls upon us – the mind is never exhausted.”

-- Amelia B. Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*

On the surface, Egyptian Revival design found in nineteenth century American silver seems fairly straightforward and simple; it is merely the inclusion of typically “ancient Egyptian” forms and motifs in design. The term “Egyptian revival” used by modern scholars to describe silver designs seems to have been borrowed from architectural history. In architectural terms, the use of ancient Egyptian design truly was a revival. Architects and designers did base “new” designs on ancient Egyptian extant architecture as it was described or illustrated by those exploring ancient Egypt. In architecture the designs were not just aesthetic, but were often also used to convey stability, long history, or religious themes like everlasting life. But in silver, the use of the designs was purely a reaction to the prevailing Egyptomania of the century.

Unlike architecture, there is no significant body of extant ancient Egyptian silver for modern silversmiths and designers to emulate. In ancient Egypt the use of silver in

any object was exceedingly rare as there were no native silver mines, therefore silver had to be imported, making it costlier than gold.¹ Because of this the items produced in silver by ancient Egyptians were, with a few exceptions, small; such as earrings, pendants, and beads.² Therefore, in the medium of silver, designs based upon images or descriptions of ancient Egypt should more accurately be termed “Egyptian-style,” produced in response to the Egyptomania prevalent in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Understanding the sweep of how history relative to Egyptian-style design developed into Egyptomania helps bring understanding to how the Egyptian-style was born into decorative arts, developed, thrived, and died away. Much like other movements in decorative arts, this ebb and flow of design choice is seen within the Egyptian-style appearances in English silver over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which predicted the rising interest in Egyptian style design in America in the nineteenth century.

The Romans, were the first to incorporate Egyptian design into their architecture and sculpture; but in later centuries, especially the eighteenth century, the knowledge of

¹ The majority of objects that have been recovered and can be seen today that “look” like silver are in actuality made from electrum, a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver that was available from several small deposits throughout Egypt. It is generally agreed upon that gold and electrum were preferred by ancient Egyptian metalworkers over silver, as they do not oxidize and tarnish. For further information about silver and metallurgy in ancient Egypt, see N.H. Gale and Z.A. Stos-Gale, “Ancient Egyptian Silver,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 67 (1981): 103–15.; Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw, eds., *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

² Silver and other metalwork vessels have been discovered, however they were found after the period covered in this thesis. These include fragments from a New Kingdom dish found at Bubastis and purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1907 (07.228.20), vessels found in Tutankhamun’s tomb (KV 62), which was discovered in 1922, and the “el-Tod treasure,” which was discovered in 1936.

what was truly Egyptian and what was Romanized Egyptian design was lost. Europeans viewed the Romanized version of ancient Egyptian design erroneously, believing it was unadulterated. By the nineteenth century, the translation of the Rosetta Stone by Jean-Francois Champollion had led to the decipherment of hieroglyphics. Subsequent translation of Egyptian texts led to renewed interest in the original meaning attached to Egyptian symbols and designs. This inquiry into the texts of Egypt fueled Egyptomania, which in turn made finding a market for silver with ancient Egyptian-style design profitable.

Although ancient Egypt had been the focus of significant attention for some time, it was not until the nineteenth century that anyone began to study it in earnest. That century witnessed a “rediscovery” of ancient Egypt by both amateur and professional scholars, which fueled Egyptomania in both Europe and America. This popular interest was the capstone of an accumulation of years of increasing curiosity about the ancient civilization, in combination with specific events that piqued the public’s interest.

Egyptian-style in design and the decorative arts was co-mingled with an increased focus on non-Western and historical design throughout the decorative arts of nineteenth century America. This led to the “eclectic” interiors popular during the latter half of the century where the Egyptian-style was mixed with naturalism, the Japoneseque, Ottoman or Turkish styles, rococo revival, and gothic revival among others. In many cases, several styles and periods were combined within a single object. The popularity of this plethora of styles greatly eclipsed the popularity and use of the Egyptian-style alone. The Egyptian-style’s usual elements were, therefore, frequently manifested throughout the

decorative arts, bringing fresh design ideas to furniture, textiles, glassware, and jewelry during the nineteenth century in the United States.

Like the Egyptian-style that emerged throughout the rest of the decorative arts in this period, the Egyptian-style which appeared in silver was not a new idea at the middle of the nineteenth century. The qualities inherent to silver allowed the Egyptian-style to utilize the motifs and designs in a manner that was almost unique to the material. The sculptural qualities and luster of silver allowed designers to provide dimension to the work which was difficult to express in other mediums. The Egyptian-style silver expressed a new aesthetic that was the product of an environment which encompassed curiosity, adventure, scholarship, combined with new technologies and the development of new ways for artisans to express their world through design.

Current scholarship has neglected the importance of the rediscovery of ancient Egypt by nineteenth century scholars and travelers as a source for design inspiration in the mid-nineteenth century decorative arts. The importance of the visual materials published by pioneering Egyptologists and travelers had a far greater impact on American silver design than is generally recognized. Comparison of these images with publications available to designers shows that they provided inspiration for many silver manufacturers throughout the United States. It is a story worth exploring to gain new understanding about what is frequently called the Egyptian Revival in silver design. Without the West's long fascination with ancient Egypt, nineteenth century Egyptian-style silver design would not have been accepted across such a wide range of society. Nineteenth century Egyptian-style silver was not just a product of changing tastes in design. It was also a

product of its environment. Without the West's long fascination with ancient Egypt, the design style would not have been as accepted across such a wide range in society.

CHAPTER TWO

“Here I may be allowed to observe, that so little is positively known of Egyptian mythology, and all description of its forms and allusions appears so unconnected and unintelligible, that some apology is perhaps necessary for dwelling at all on such apparently ungrateful subjects:-- all that can be said in its defense, is, that if we never attempt to unfold, or assist others in explaining these and similar intricacies, no progress will be made towards an object highly interesting. But as we are not yet authorized to form systems, we must content ourselves with stating facts, and multiplying observations, in order to approximate by degrees towards the truth... Perhaps the aera [sic] is approaching when some light is to be thrown upon the mysteries of Egypt.”

-- William Hamilton, *Ægyptiaca, or Some Account of the Antient and Modern State of Egypt*

One of the most overlooked concepts that impacted design and the appearance of the Egyptian-style in silver is Egyptomania; the interest, and often obsession with, all things related to ancient Egypt. This concept is well documented, and is associated with widely publicized events such as the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb by Howard Carter in 1922. In fact, Egyptomania has a long history encompassing scholarship, popular culture, art, and design. According to scholar James Steven Curl, the Egyptian-style has been a “recurring theme in the history of taste.”³ Without this long history of interest in the ancient civilization, it is unlikely that Egyptian motifs would have had

³James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London: Routledge, 2005), xxx.

enough impact to have appeared in nineteenth century silver, even in the midst of other historicizing designs that became popular at the same time.

The seeds from which the mystique of Egypt and its ancient history sprouted have continually expanded through the centuries. This mosaic, based on generations of observations and stories about extant ancient sites in Egypt, was both accurate at points and complete fantasy at others. It is likely that the travelers and explorers of the nineteenth century were drawn to Egypt by their personal need to understand what was factual versus what was merely romantic notion. Nonetheless, the mystique surrounding all things Egyptian was in large part, responsible for the Western comprehension of Egypt that was the accepted understanding until the advent of modern archaeology and the scientific methodology of the nineteenth century.

The Greek historian Herodotus wrote one of the very first accounts of ancient Egypt, and his text was long considered to be an important element of the Western comprehension of ancient Egypt. Herodotus visited Egypt around 450 B.C. and recorded everything from notable achievements of the ancient Egyptians, to descriptions of geography, and the construction of the Great Pyramid. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Herodotus' bluntness led to general disbelief in his overall accuracy.

Rome had a long and rather complicated history in regards to Egyptian art. After the annexation of Egypt by Rome, obelisks and other statuary from Egypt were taken to Rome, as well as iconography of traditional Egyptian religion. In addition, Roman artisans began to produce "Egyptianized" works, while artisans in annexed Egypt

produced Romanized pieces.⁴ By the eighteenth century, tourists and scholars viewed what was a mix of pre Greco-Roman Egyptian antiquities, Egyptianized Roman antiquities, and Romanized Egyptian antiquities.

Many of these antiquities clearly were produced in the Greco-Roman art tradition, and merely represented Egyptian gods that had made their way into the Roman pantheon. In many cases, Roman artists adapted Egyptian art to fit within the existing Roman art tradition; the stiff, linear, idealized images inherent to Egyptian art became softer and more fluid. However, Rome was also one of the few places where people could see actual Egyptian antiquities outside of Egypt itself.⁵

Although it would not be understood fully until after the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Egyptian antiquities present in Rome did not present a very accurate or representative cross-section of Egyptian art history. This limited selection created a skewed and almost fantastical view of ancient Egypt. Bernard de Montfaucon (1655-1741) used the Egyptianized Roman designs as his models and the inaccuracies can be seen in his works.

Following the fall of the Roman Empire, and the subsequent Arab conquest of Egypt in 624 C.E., the concept of ancient Egypt appeared to fade into obscurity. Very few people from the West traveled to Egypt. The handful who did were mostly pilgrims on their way to or from Jerusalem. They travelled there mainly because of the country's

⁴ In this context, "Egyptianized" refers to Roman art taking on the characteristics of Egyptian art, such as iconography and dress. Sally-Ann Ashton, *Roman Egyptomania* (London: Golden House Publications, 2004), 48-49.

⁵ The majority of the Egyptian antiquities found in Rome by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dated from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods of Egyptian history, with very little that represented pharaonic Egypt.

biblical associations, rather than fulfilling scholarly inquiry or passing interest, and only a handful of accounts of Egypt survived from the period.⁶ Interest reappeared during the Renaissance, when large numbers of ancient texts that addressed ancient Egypt were rediscovered, and by the seventeenth century, Egypt had become the subject of intensifying interest and scholarship. Travelers began to return to Egypt to satisfy their curiosity, and an increasing amount of scholarship was dedicated to the study of the sites and monuments.⁷

It was in the eighteenth century that interest in ancient Egypt truly began to blossom. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, Egypt became a place of intellectual inquiry rather than just passing interest. Scholars traveled to Egypt in increasing numbers, and their studies became part of the steadily increasing number of publications that covered topics ranging from the location of ancient cities to the architecture of the pyramids on the Giza Plateau.⁸

While many scholars were caught up in the fervor created by the discovery of the Roman sites of Herculaneum and Pompeii in the 1730s, other scholars bent their interest upon study of ancient Egypt. In 1741, The Egypt Society was founded in London by John

⁶ The most notable of these early accounts is the fourteenth century travelogue *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile, Knight*, which was proven to be a work of fiction shortly after it was written.

⁷ Athanasius Kircher's *Lingua Aegyptiaca restitute* (1643) and *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652-1654) became one of the most influential works on ancient Egyptian history and language until the nineteenth century.

⁸ Some of the most significant publications from the eighteenth century include Richard Pococke's *Description of the East, and Some Other Countries* (1743-1745) and Frederick Ludwig Norden's *Drawings of Some Ruins and Colossal Statues at Thebes in Egypt, with an Account of the Same in a Letter to the Royal Society* (1741), *Travels in Egypt and Nubia* (1755), and *The Antiquities, Natural History, Ruins and Other Curiosities of Egypt, Nubia, and Thebes* (1780).

Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich, charged with “the promotion & preserving of Egyptian & other ancient learning.”⁹ To these men, the art of ancient Egypt deserved the same status as that of Greece and Rome. Due to the fact that scholars at this time did not have the luxury of understanding Egyptian texts and there was little in the way to collect or analyze outside of architecture and statuary, Egyptian art remained an intellectual curiosity.

While the history of the relationship between Greece, Rome, and Egypt is important, it needs to be noted that in the eighteenth century the visual contributions of ancient Egypt were not seen as art, unlike the visual contributions of Greece and Rome which were considered art. This is supported by the fact that we see no ancient Egyptian motifs in European silver until after the time of Napoleon’s campaign in Egypt, which ignited the craze for all things Egyptian in Europe, and eventually in America. It is also the likely reason why no silver in England displays Egyptian motifs until after 1800. This eventual acceptance of ancient Egyptian design in silver would be mirrored again in mid-nineteenth century America.

Although general knowledge of ancient Egypt was steadily increasing throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the same cannot be said of visual knowledge of the topic. Illustrations were not always included in publications and the accuracy of the existent illustrations seemed to be dependent upon the knowledge of the writers or the artistic ability of the illustrators. The inaccuracies could also be exacerbated by the engraver responsible for producing the printing plates for publication. It is important to

⁹ Jason Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology*, vol. 1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015), 88.

note that the artists seemed to have been content with an impression of ancient Egyptian architecture and design, more than complete accuracy of line.

Some travelers did bring back antiquities from Egypt, but with a few exceptions, these items consisted of mummies, or small items such as votive figures and canopic jars. Such antiquities were far more prized for their display of exoticness, than for the development any understanding of ancient Egyptian art. Viewed as curiosities, these objects for the most part remained in private collections, unpublished, and inaccessible to scholars, artists, and designers.¹⁰

Access to images of authentic Egyptian antiquities, outside of publications and private collections, eventually did become available. In England, the first major publically accessible collection of Egyptian antiquities was made available in 1753, when Sir Hans Sloane bequeathed his collection of antiquities, natural history specimens, books, and other objects and ephemera to the nascent British Museum, which had been established in June of that year. However, the number of antiquities in Sloane's collection was relatively few, and the majority of the collection was comprised of natural history specimens. While the museum would continue to acquire Egyptian artifacts through the rest of the century, Egyptian art continued to be viewed and valued for its "exoticness," rather than an expression of artistic ability.¹¹

¹⁰ In 1737, antiquarian Alexander Gordon published *Twenty-five Plates of all the Egyptian Mummies and Other Egyptian Antiquities in England*, which documented antiquities from at least twelve private collections. However, like all other early illustrations of ancient Egypt and its antiquities, their accuracy largely depended on the skills of the illustrator.

¹¹ Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43.

It was, however, this curiosity about the ancient civilization, partnered with an increased visual understanding that went along with Egyptomania that would lead to the Egyptian design-style that ultimately emerged in the nineteenth century. While the contributions of the many authors and artists who studied Egypt in the eighteenth century did not directly affect the silver designs that would develop in America, they were reflected in the rise of Egyptomania and the creation of Egyptian-style design.

CHAPTER THREE

The circumambient darkness, that for two thousand years not only baffled every inquiry into primeval history, but rendered Egypt, her time-worn edifices, her ancient inhabitants, their religion, arts, sciences, institutions, learning, language, history, conquests and dominion, almost incomprehensible mysteries, has now been broken; and the translation of the sacred Legends, sculptured on monumental vestiges of Pharaonic glory, enables up now to define and to explain, with tolerable accuracy, these once-recondite annals, that were to the Romans ‘a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.

-- George R. Gliddon, *Ancient Egypt: Her monuments, hieroglyphics, history and archaeology, and other subjects connected with hieroglyphical literature*

If the eighteenth century was about the discovery of Egypt, then the nineteenth century was about the exploration, understanding, and popularization of Egypt. This enthusiasm made its way into the popular culture and art of America as it had earlier in England and Europe. Ancient Egypt proved to be just as popular in America as it was in England. A snapshot of nineteenth century America gives understanding to why Egyptomania existed and grew in America.

Americans were avid consumers of news and information about ancient Egypt throughout the century despite their distance from Egypt. Many Americans initially became interested in Egypt due to its prominence in the Bible, but for numerous people, this interest extended past its religious connotations into a more general interest in all things Egyptian. Through the century, the prevalent interest in ancient Egypt evolved into

what became known as Egyptomania, which influenced everything from popular culture to literature, architecture, and design.

Even as early as 1788, there were Americans traveling to Egypt. Most of these visitors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were merchants, military officials, or government officials, although there were a few men of means who did travel to take in the sights. Many scholars who have studied the early exploration of Egypt have noted that Americans lagged behind England and other European nations in travel to Egypt in the early nineteenth century, in part likely due to preoccupation with exploring their own continent. This relative lack of contact did not, however, indicate disinterest in the subject. Newspapers from all over the newly independent United States reported on Napoleon's expedition, the exploits of such figures as English Consul General Henry Salt and Giovanni Belzoni, and Jean-Francois Champollion's decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics using the Rosetta Stone, reflecting the American enthusiasm for contact with Egypt. News about Egypt, often via London or Paris, filled American newspapers. Even as early as 1801, word of new discoveries in Egypt reached the *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, stating that

A complete knowledge has been obtained of the monuments of antiquity which now remain (the most valuable of which are in Upper Egypt,) and plans of the feite [sic] of the ancient cities have been taken. Drawings have been taken of the pieces of sculpture which embellish the antique monuments. They represent sacrifices made to the different deities, battles, triumphal entries, &c.¹²

It also stated that "The most remarkable and interesting prize for science, which has been discovered is two zodiacs, the one engraved at the base of a peristyle at Esne, the other in

¹² "Egyptian Discoveries," *The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, April 29, 1801.

the great temple at Dendera,” in reference to the famed Zodiac of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera.¹³

Among the most notable early American travelers to Egypt was Colonel Mendes Cohen from Baltimore, Maryland. Cohen spent five months in Egypt in 1832 during a six-year long tour of Europe and the Near East. He returned to the United States with a relatively large collection of Egyptian antiquities that he purchased at auction from the estate of Henry Salt, the English consul to Egypt who was responsible for several notable discoveries.¹⁴ Between 1842 and 1844, Cohen’s collection would be used by George Robbins Gliddon, the English born former U.S. vice-consul to Egypt, to present lectures on ancient Egypt around the United States. Gliddon traveled as far west as St. Louis to present his lectures and had attendance as high as two-thousand people at some lectures.¹⁵ In addition to his highly successful lectures, Gliddon also was an author who published several pamphlets on ancient Egypt, including *Ancient Egypt. Her monuments, hieroglyphics, history and archaeology, and other subjects connected with hieroglyphical literature* (1843), which sold over twenty-four thousand copies and went through multiple editions.¹⁶ In the preface to *Ancient Egypt*, Gliddon stated that the goal of his work was to “popularize information, that may tend to a better appreciation of these abstruse subjects, that has hitherto been deemed feasible; as well as to induce abler hands

¹³ “Egyptian Discoveries.”

¹⁴ In 1884, Cohen’s collection of Egyptian antiquities was given by his family to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where it remains today in their archaeological museum.

¹⁵ Nancy Thomas, *The American Discovery of Ancient Egypt* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1995), 22.

¹⁶ Jason Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology*, vol. 2 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2015), 202.

to supply deficiencies.”¹⁷ Gliddon also noted that attending lectures on topics such as the history of ancient Egypt was a truly American pastime, as Europeans were astounded that educated Americans would forgo the opportunity to attend other popular entertainment for a lecture:

In *England*, to this very hour, there are *no public lectures whatever* on Egyptian Archaeology: and the fact that many thousands of America’s citizens have spontaneously attended Discourses upon Hieroglyphics, in some European circles is yet unbelievably, in others it is a topic of mingled wonder and applause. It was upon the diffusion of *education* among the *people* of the United States and their thirst for knowledge, fostered by Institutional freedom in this vast Republic, that the writer...grounded his hopes and calculations; nor, whilst he merely claimed to be the popular expositor of the profound researches of *others*, without the slightest pretension to aught by as much fidelity of narrative as lay within the compass of his reach or abilities, has he ever doubted, that the inquiring intelligence of the *New World* would be found fully equal to the appreciation of discoveries that for half a century have constituted the unceasing study, the increasing attention, and the herculean labors of the greatest men and nations of the *Old*.¹⁸

A tourism industry began to develop in Egypt as an increased number of people from the United States, England, and Europe desired to travel to that country. Whereas, at the beginning of the century, the majority of visitors to Egypt were merchants, diplomats, or military personnel; by mid-century true tourists, including women, who traveled to see the sights began to comprise the majority of visitors. Prior to 1838, most American traveled to Egypt via Europe, and then arranged passage on a commercial sailing ship from Beirut, Malta, the Greek island of Syra, or Smyrna, Turkey to the Egyptian port city

¹⁷ George R. Gliddon, *Ancient Egypt. Her Monuments, Hieroglyphics, History and Archaeology, and Other Subjects Connected with Hieroglyphical Literature*, 13th ed. (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1850), 1.

¹⁸ Gliddon, Appendix, 1-2.

of Alexandria.¹⁹ Travel via these ships was largely unpredictable, since there were no set timetables or itineraries. By 1835, passage aboard British steam ships that operated on regular, established schedules was available from Malta to Alexandria; and from Bombay, India to Suez, Egypt. Regular travel via French and Austrian steam ships was available shortly thereafter. By 1838, transatlantic steamboat travel became available between New York and various European ports.²⁰ With these innovations in transportation, travel to Egypt by 1840 not only became more regular, but also more accessible to a wider range of people who could afford to travel for pleasure. Once in Egypt, tourists followed an itinerary that had largely been standardized; arriving in Egypt, visiting Cairo, traveling up the Nile River by steamboat or *dahabeah* as far as the second cataract, and then return to Cairo.

Travel companies, most notably Thomas Cook & Son, were integral in making travel to Egypt and other locations in the Middle East more affordable and available to a much larger socio-economic group. Although at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Egypt was a destination of choice only for the wealthy and educated Eastern elite; by mid-century, Thomas Cook & Son was able to arrange affordable trips for the middle classes. Cook was able build upon existing transportation networks of hotels, restaurants, and other goods and services and negotiate reduced and group rates.²¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, a flourishing tourism industry was established in Egypt, with

¹⁹ Oliver, 196.

²⁰ Oliver, 234.

²¹ F Robert Hunter, "Tourism and Empire: The Thomas Cook & Son Enterprise on the Nile, 1868-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 5 (2004): 30.

everyone from the wealthy to middle class men and women taking in the sights of the once mysterious land.

Travelers returned to the United States with Egyptian antiquities as souvenirs of their visit to Egypt. Some of these antiquities would go on to form the Egyptian collection at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, the oldest museum collection of Egyptian antiquities in the United States, dating from 1825.²² Later in the nineteenth century, the great Egyptological collections in the United States began to emerge, with the gift of 4,500 Egyptian antiquities to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 1872, and a similar gift to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1874.²³

Viewing the nascent Egyptological collections at American museums and commercial travel photography allowed those who could not afford to travel to Egypt, even with the economical travel rates by mid-century, to see the sights of Egypt without leaving the country. The most notable of these photographers, Francis Frith, published his photographs in *Egypt and Palestine* (1858) to great financial success.²⁴

Further fueling the growing Egyptomania was the availability of published materials. Americans consumed just as much literature about ancient Egypt during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as was read in England. There was a steady supply of

²² Thompson, 195.

²³ Lawrence M. Berman, "The Prehistory of the Egyptian Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston," in *Egyptian Museum Collections around the World: Studies for the Centennial of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2002), 127.

²⁴ For more information on Frith, see Douglas R. Nickel, *Francis Frith in Egypt and Palestine: A Victorian Photographer Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), and further information about commercial photography in Egypt, see Kathleen Steward Howe, ed., *Excursions Along the Nile: The Photographic Discovery of Ancient Egypt* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1993).

European literature throughout the nineteenth century about ancient Egypt which was imported or reprinted in America reflecting and fueling the growing interest in Egypt.

Based on the groundbreaking work presented in the *Description de l'Égypte*, in 1802, the American Academy of the Arts elected both Napoleon Bonaparte and Dominique-Vivant Denon as honorary members based on their publications and in recognition of their efforts to promote the scientific study of Egypt.²⁵ In 1803, an English translation of Denon's *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte* was published in abridged form, and without illustrations. In 1812, *the Select Reviews of Literature and Spirit of Foreign Magazines*, a periodical published in Philadelphia that was "designed to give the *Essence* [sic] of all that is interesting therein, in Science; edifying or agreeable in Literature; beneficial in New Discoveries; or remarkable in Voyages or Travels," included an advertisement for copies of *Description de l'Égypte* that had been imported from London to America, and stated that "...their researches into the antiquities, natural history, and productions of that country, reflect the highest honour on the savans [sic] and artists who were employed on this occasion. We are presented with the result of their labours in the truly superb, expensive, and imperial publication..."²⁶ Current research estimates that by 1840, there were at least eleven complete copies of the *Description de l'Égypte* in American personal, private, and public libraries.²⁷

²⁵ Thomas, *The American Discovery of Ancient Egypt*, 22.

²⁶ John F. Watson, "A Description of Egypt, or a Collection of the Observations...", *Select Reviews of Literature and Spirit of Foreign Magazines*, 1812.

²⁷ Andrew Oliver, *American Travelers on the Nile: Early U.S. Visitors to Egypt, 1774-1839* (Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 121.

The number of scholarly publications, the rise in the popularity of travel guides for Egypt, and of written travelogues was facilitated by steamboat travel in the 1830s. These publications were immensely popular, and many that were originally published in Britain were also available in America. Much like the news coming from Egypt, many travelogues were serialized and published in installments in various newspapers. Among the most notable available books were John Gardner Wilkinson's *Topography of Thebes, and General View of Egypt: Being a Short Account of the Principal Objects Worthy of Notice in the Valley of the Nile...* (1835), which was republished by John Murray in 1847 as the condensed one-volume *Hand-book for Travellers in Egypt*. Until the 1870s when much of his research was disproven, Wilkinson was a widely respected early Egyptologist, and his publications were found on many bookshelves in the United States. Nevertheless, *Hand-book for Travellers in Egypt* was published in multiple editions through the turn of the twentieth century.

Other travel publications that were influential included Thomas Cook & Son's *Cook's Tourists' Handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the Desert* (1876) and its sister publication *The Nile: Notes for Travellers in Egypt* (1886) by Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge, lauding that "Thanks to the extraordinary development of modern travel, the Second Cataract of the Nile, or the peaks of Mount Sinai are no longer the shadowy and mysterious goals of travel they once were. Year by year the tide of tourists to these and other Eastern localities increases; and to assist in their necessarily brief and rapid survey,

the present volume is prepared.”²⁸ Both publications went through multiple editions, and provided practical information about travel in Egypt, with necessary historical background information, although they relied heavily on Cook’s network of hotels, boats, and guides.²⁹ Widely popular travelogues included Florence Nightingale’s *Letters from Egypt* (1854) which focused on Egypt’s ancient past and Lucie Duff Gordon’s publication, also titled *Letters from Egypt* (1865) focused on modern life in Egypt.

New York Herald reporter John Russell Young’s popular book *Around the World with General Grant*, was an illustrated two-volume set published in 1879. This book was based on a trip through Egypt and around the world which he took in 1877 with former United States President Ulysses S. Grant and his wife. The trip which followed Grant’s presidency detailed the Grants arrival in Alexandria, Egypt in January 1878. The American Consul General to Egypt, Elbert Eli Farman, who also escorted Grant on this trip, detailed his account of the trip in his book, published in 1904, *Along the Nile with General Grant*.³⁰

Perhaps the most influential of the nineteenth century travelogue authors was novelist and journalist Amelia B. Edwards. Published following her first trip to Egypt from 1873 to 1874, Edward’s first travelogue, *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* (1877) became a bestseller in both England and the United States. After the success of her publication, and after she became aware of tourism’s destructive effects on ancient

²⁸ Thomas Cook & Son, *Cook’s Tourists’ Handbook for Egypt, The Nile and The Desert* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1876), iv.

²⁹ Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology*, vol. 1, 260.

³⁰ Ronald H. Fritze, *Egyptomania: A History of Fascination, Obsession and Fantasy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 206.

Egyptian monuments, Edwards devoted the rest of her life to the study and preservation of Egyptian antiquities. In 1882, Edwards, along with Reginald Stuart Poole, founded the Egypt Exploration Society, with the mission of exploring and excavating areas in Egypt, and publishing the findings of the excavations.³¹ The following year, the American branch of the Egypt Exploration Society was established under the auspices of American clergyman William Copley Winslow. In 1889, Edwards began an extremely successful lecture tour of the United States in order to raise awareness about the Egypt Exploration Fund.³² During her tour, Edward's work was widely lauded. One newspaper, announcing one of her upcoming lectures stated, "Miss Edwards is as famous as a novelist, traveler and Egyptologist. She is one of the most brilliant of living women...her ability is splendidly shown in her articles in the Britannica Encyclopedia upon Egyptology...her Times articles on archaeology and Egyptological discoveries are extensively copied."³³

Of course, events that contributed to the growing Egyptomania in the United States were not limited to those discussed above. There were many other events, people, publications, and objects relating to Egypt that dominated the news. These included the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869, the inauguration of the new opera house in Cairo with the premiere of the opera *Aida* by Giuseppe Verdi in 1871, and the 1880 gift

³¹ T.G.H James, ed., *Excavating in Egypt: The Egypt Exploration Society 1882-1982* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 9.

³² Roberta Munoz, "Amelia Edwards in America - A Quiet Revolution in Archaeological Science," *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 27, no. 1 (2017): 7, <https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-598>.

³³ "This Noted Woman to Lecture at the Hyperion on November 11 and 14.," *Morning Journal and Courier*, November 1, 1889.

of an ancient obelisk known as “Cleopatra’s Needle” to the United States from Egypt, and its placement in New York’s Central Park.³⁴

The nineteenth century was an entire century of fascination and obsession with Egypt. Like many society-wide interests, it was reflected across the arts; art, architecture, and design. The evidence of a growing Egyptomania can be seen steadily throughout the century. It was not merely a series of significant events which created Egyptomania in America, but a phenomenon that grew steadily through the century. It is no surprise, then, that Egyptian elements appeared in American silver design.

³⁴ The Egyptian obelisk placed in Central Park was one of three obelisks known as “Cleopatra’s Needle.” The first of these was given as a gift to Britain in 1819 and is located in London. The second obelisk is located in Paris, and was gifted to France in 1826, and erected in 1833.

CHAPTER FOUR

“The Egyptian mania has spread further – even our furniture is decorated with the symbolical forms of the religion and other customs of Egypt.”

-- Sir John Soane

Before looking further at English Egyptian-style silver, it is important to understand that the Egyptian-style silver produced in England does not have a direct relationship with the Egyptian-style silver of the nineteenth century in America, but it is important to discuss what designers in England produced as contrast to Egyptian-style silver created in America during that century. The manifestation of Egyptian-style in English silver design establishes for modern scholars a framework of how Egyptian motifs might be incorporated into American silver. By looking at the English silver it becomes apparent that the American silver designers were looking to the same sources for inspiration, also selecting architectural design elements, but creating designs which are uniquely American reflections of the Egyptian-style.

English silversmiths and silver designers did not fully embrace ancient Egyptian forms and decorations, but rather, carefully chose elements from the Egyptian artistic cannon. Even with this limited approach to the emerging Egyptian-style, English artists and designers were not strangers to the interest in Egypt that was sweeping through the ranks of antiquarians and scholars during the eighteenth century. English silversmiths'

contributions to Egyptian-style design have been varied, but extremely important to understanding the arc of the Egyptian-style. Produced primarily in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the inclusion of decoration from outside the norms of neoclassicism set a precedent relative to the use of Egyptian motifs in silver design at the time when England was the largest and most fashionable maker of domestic silver in the world.

While the Egyptian-style may have been popular in Italy throughout the eighteenth century, largely due to the region's proximity to Egyptian and Roman antiquities, the Egyptian-style was not nearly as quick to become popular in England manufactured in any form or medium, let alone silver. The earliest example of Egyptian-style in silver appears to be a coffeepot, stand, and burner, likely produced around 1770 by the firm Boulton and Fothergill (fig. 1).



Figure 1 Coffee Pot, Burner, and Stand. Attributed to James Wyatt, designer; Boulton & Fothergill, manufacturer. Birmingham, England, c.1770. Sterling silver, cane, ebonized wood. Image © Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

It prominently features sphinxes and enigmatic faces wearing a modified version of the iconic *nemes* headdress, which was the striped headcloth usually seen in depictions of pharaohs, here more closely resembling Greek or Roman drapery than the stiff, stylized

Egyptian headdress (fig. 2).³⁵ Compared to examples seen in antiquities, and even in silver produced at the end of the century, both the headdress and sphinxes appear more European than Egyptian (fig.3).



Figure 2 Large Kneeling Statue of Hatshepsut. Thebes, Egypt, Dynasty 18, ca.1479-1458 B.C. Granite. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

³⁵ Katja Goebis, "Crowns," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).



Figure 3 Sphinx of Amenhotep II. Egypt. Dynasty 18, ca. 1427-1400 B.C. Sandstone. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

It is unclear where the designer of the coffeepot looked for inspiration; however, it is possible that it came from the plates of Bernard de Montfaucon's *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, which was originally published between 1719 and 1724, and published in an English translation between 1721 and 1725. Montfaucon, a priest, never actually traveled to Egypt, but rather based his descriptions of Egyptian art on the antiquities found in and around Rome. While many of the figures in the plates that represent Egypt are recognizably Egyptian, some lack the stylization that is the hallmark of ancient Egyptian art, and seem to have more in common with a Greek sculpture, or an eighteenth century drawing. Montfaucon's work includes figures that are very similar to the busts and sphinxes seen in the coffeepot (fig. 4 and fig. 5).



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Médiathèque du musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac

Figure 4 Plate from Montfaucon's *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*. Image courtesy, Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Figure 5 Plate from Montfaucon's *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*. Image courtesy, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Like most English Egyptian-style decorative arts and design, the bulk of the silver produced in the Egyptian-style was made after Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798 expedition to Egypt. This French expedition was not just a watershed moment in the history of Egyptology and the study of ancient Egypt, but also in Egyptian-style design due to the efforts of the French Commission of Sciences and Arts members who accompanied the

expedition. This group was comprised of 151 artists, scientists, engineers, surveyors, and other technically skilled civilians who were given the task of recording “Egypt in its entirety, past and present.”³⁶ While this grand survey was primarily undertaken to understand Egypt in a way that would allow its development into a subsidiary of France, the expedition also provided one of the first “scientific” visual descriptions of ancient Egyptian monuments and antiquities.

The product of the Commission of Sciences and Arts was the great *Description de l’Égypte: ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l’expédition de l’armée française, publié par les ordres de sa majesté l’empereur Napoléon le Grand*, which consisted of twenty-three volumes of text, maps, and plates, divided between the three subjects of extant antiquities, the modern state, and natural history, and was published between 1809 and 1828.³⁷ The *Description de l’Égypte* presented a visual representation of Egypt never seen before; in addition to the text and maps, 837 copper-plate engravings were created which contained over three-thousand illustrations, which were all printed on over three-thousand reams of oversize paper.³⁸ Both French publications, and subsequent publications based on these works evidentially had a significant influence on English silver design, as they were the most identifiable sources for Egyptian-style designs produced by English silversmiths.

Also to come out of the Napoleonic expedition, and become important to designers of silver and other decorative arts, was the work of Vivant Denon. Denon was

³⁶ Jason Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology*, vol. 1 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015), 98.

³⁷ Thompson, 106.

³⁸ Thompson, 105.

an artist and scholar amongst the “savants” of the Commission of Arts and Sciences. As the oldest member of the Commission, Denon had a lifelong dream to travel to Egypt and while there with Napoleon’s expedition, he made sketches and notes on everything from the oft-visited pyramids and sphinx on the Giza Plateau, to some of the less popular sites in Upper Egypt. Upon returning to France, Denon published his notes and sketches in 1802 as *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte pendant les campagnes de Bonaparte*, with an English translation published in 1803.³⁹ Like the *Description de l’Égypte*, Denon’s publication became influential within the design community. His sketches were used as inspiration by Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine in *Recueil des decorations intérieures*, their influential discourse on Empire design. They were also used by Thomas Hope, who is often considered the founder of English Egyptian-style design, in *Household furniture and interior decoration*. These publications would eventually be found in many, if not all, silver designer’s libraries providing them with rich source material for their designs.

There was a fad for all things Egyptian following the Napoleonic expedition in Egypt, which seemed to be sparked by their publication. As stated by Robert Southey, an English poet and scholar,

Everything must now be Egyptian: the ladies wear crocodile ornaments, and you sit upon a sphinx in a room hung round with mummies, and with the long, black, lean-armed, long-nosed, hieroglyphical men, who are enough to make the children afraid to go to bed. The very shopboards must be metamorphosed into the mode, and painted in Egyptian letters, which, as the Egyptians had no letters, you will doubtless conceive must be curious.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ronald H. Fritze, *Egyptomania: A History of Fascination, Obsession and Fantasy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 162-63.

⁴⁰ Robert Southey, *Letters from England* (New York: G. Dearborn, 1836), 391.

However, in a broad sense, Egyptian art did not directly have an overwhelming influence on English decorative arts. This was most likely the result of ancient Egyptian art itself having been considered more of a curiosity than serious art. While elements of ancient Egyptian art were adopted in furniture and ceramic design as well as in silver, it almost always seems to have been used in conjunction with Classical forms and decoration, which comprised the majority of the designs. As stated by Patrick Conner, often the Egyptian-style that worked its way into English design amounted to no more than a single element of Egyptian design, such as a sphinx, an Egyptian mask, or a winged sun disk placed onto a piece of more “conventional” design.⁴¹

In addition to having been limited in its availability, demand for Egyptian-style silver also seems to have been limited. Of the known pieces, the majority seem to have been commissioned by wealthy, educated clientele from the highest levels of society. Relatively few pieces are known to have existed that were produced in fused plate, or produced for lower levels of the gentry.

The majority of the Egyptian-style silver produced in England, especially through the first half the nineteenth century, was produced under the auspices of Rundell & Bridge (1797-1843), a luxury manufacturing firm specializing in silver, silver gilt, and jewelry.⁴² Both Philip Rundell and John Bridge were trained jewelers; however, for the silver commissioned through their firm, they relied on the work of some of the most

⁴¹ Patrick Conner, ed., *The Inspiration of Egypt: Its Influence on British Artists, Travellers and Designers, 1700-1900* (Brighton: Brighton Borough Council, 1983), 40.

⁴² Christopher Hartop, *Royal Goldsmiths: The Art of Rundell & Bridge 1797-1843* (Cambridge: John Adamson for Koopman Rare Art, 2005), 21.

notable designers, architects, sculptors, and silversmiths of their day.⁴³ Included among these notable names was the French designer Jean-Jacques Boileau (active 1788-1851).⁴⁴ Prior to his employment with Rundell & Bridge, Boileau came to England to participate in the decoration of Carlton House for George IV as Prince of Wales.⁴⁵ Having been trained in France, Boileau was familiar with the emergent Empire style which became popular under Napoleon. The style was typified by the “simplicity and solidarity,” which in silver was manifested in designs emphasizing the form of the piece over the surface decoration.⁴⁶ Empire silver designs took on a sculptural look that was enhanced by cast elements that were combined to create the overall ornamentation.⁴⁷

Following the publication of the *Description de l'Égypte* and Denon's *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte*, Egyptian-style design became a part of the Empire style, especially amongst Napoleon and his circle; however, it seems to have had very little impact on more general French silver design.⁴⁸ Included amongst the limited pieces of French Egyptian-style silver are the mounts created by silversmith Martin-Guillaume Biennais for a coin cabinet by François-Honoré-Georges Jacob Desmaltre (Fig.6).

⁴³ Hartop, *Royal Goldsmiths*, 50-51.

⁴⁴ Hartop, *Royal Goldsmiths*, 59.

⁴⁵ Anthony Phillips and Jeanne Sloane, *Antiquity Revisited: English and French Silver Gilt from the Collection of Audrey Love* (London: Christie's Books, 1997), 8.

⁴⁶ James David Draper, *The Arts Under Napoleon* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), 1, 4.

⁴⁷ Draper, 4.

⁴⁸ Christopher Hartop, “Empire Silver: A Gilded Age,” in *Josephine and the Arts of the Empire* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 148.



Figure 6 Coin Cabinet, Francois-Honore-Georges Jacob-Desmaller and Martin-Guillaume Bennis. Paris, France, ca. 1809-19. Mahogany, applied and inlaid silver. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The piece overall was designed by Charles Percier, and based on sketches of the pylon gate at Ghoss, formerly Apollonopolis Parva, by Vivant Denon when he was in Egypt with the Napoleonic expedition.⁴⁹ There does seem to be some disagreement about the design source for the silver mounts, as arguments have been made for both Denon's sketches and for much earlier drawings by Frederick Norden, a Danish naval captain and

⁴⁹ "Coin Cabinet," Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/195473>.

explorer.⁵⁰ Even with this disagreement over sources, the design of the mounts does hint at a greater reliance on the emerging documentation of ancient Egyptian remains over artistic interpretation. Whatever the sources used for Egyptian-style design, Jean-Jacques Boileau brought both practical knowledge of the Empire style, and increased awareness of ancient Egyptian design to English silver through his designs for Rundell & Bridge.

In addition Boileau, Rundell & Bridge also employed designer Charles Heathcote Tatham, who had worked as an executive architect on the English designer Thomas Hope's house on Duchess Street, London.⁵¹ While Hope was mainly a proponent of neoclassicism, he is also often considered to be one of the founders of English Egyptian-style design. The designs for his house, which were documented in *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration Executed from Designs by Thomas Hope* (1807), included a number of designs which incorporated Egyptian motifs, including the famous Egyptian Room.⁵²

Boileau and Tatham were involved in one of the largest commissions ever produced by Rundell & Bridge. Invoiced in 1811, the Grand Service, commissioned by George IV as Prince Regent, comprised 4,000 pieces of silver, silver-gilt, and ormolu. A number of designers and silversmiths were involved in its production, and it also encompassed a number of different design styles.⁵³ Inventoried in 1832, fifty-one items in

⁵⁰ Jean-Marcel Humbert et al., eds., *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art, 1730-1930* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 206.

⁵¹ Hartop, *Royal Goldsmiths*, 57.

⁵² David Watkin and Philip Hewat-Jaboor, eds., *Thomas Hope: Regency Designer* (New Haven: Yale University Press for The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture, 2008), 23.

⁵³ Hartop, *Royal Goldsmiths*, 86.

the service were described as possessing Egyptian elements, including tureens, salts, candelabras, and an incense burner.⁵⁴

As would become the fashion with other Egyptian-style silver produced in England through the first half the nineteenth century, the Egyptian-style pieces of the Grand Service encompassed largely classical forms with classical and Egyptian decoration. The inclusion of Egyptian-style iconography ranged from the relatively simple, such as the inclusion of Egyptian masks on the salts (fig. 7) and Egyptian busts and sphinxes on the candelabras (fig. 8), to designs that warrant deeper discussion, such as tureens that were produced in the classic form of a round bowl with cover. The cover featured a handle of intertwined snakes, and a ring of beading and classically imagined lotus leaves. The body of the tureen featured handles in the form of term figures with the head of Diana of Ephesus, and banding underneath. The body of the tureen featured a classically styled frieze, and a winged mask with a clearly recognizable *nemes* headdress, and a square base that featured four winged Egyptian-style sphinxes, also with *nemes* headdresses (fig. 9).

⁵⁴ Rundell, Bridge, & Co., *Descriptive Inventories of the Various Services of Plate, &c. Belonging to the Crown in Several Royal Palaces, and Also of the Plate in the Several Royal Chapels, in England* (London, 1832).



Figure 7 Salt (part of the Grand Service). Digby Scott and Benjamin Smith II, silversmiths. Rundell & Bridge, retailer. London, England, 1802. Gilt silver. Image courtesy, Royal Collection Trust.



Figure 8 Candelabra. Scott Digby and Benjamin Smith II, silversmiths. Rundell & Bridge, retailer. London, England, 1806. Gilt silver. Victoria & Albert Museum.



Figure 9 Tureen (part of the Grand Service). Paul Storr, silversmith. London, England, 1802. Gilt silver. Image courtesy, Royal Collection Trust.

The sauceboats featured a handle in the form of a dual-tailed serpent with a lion's head, surmounted by an egg-shaped ornament with acanthus leaves, which echoes the sun-disks seen above many Egyptian deities, and which represented a connection to the Egyptian sun-god Re.(fig. 10) This representation is very similar to the iconography used in ancient Egypt to depict the goddess Wadjet, in her form as an Eye of Re (fig. 11).⁵⁵ Underneath the serpent handle are two hybrid animals, and a winged mask, all in the classical style, and underneath the spout is another winged Egyptian-style mask with a

⁵⁵ Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), 227.

nemes headdress. On each side of the body of the sauceboat are representations of the god Re, as a sun-disk with outstretched horizontal wings and two serpent heads; imagery taken directly from Egyptian iconography (fig. 12).



Figure 10 Sauceboat (part of the Grand Service). Digby Scott and Benjamin Smith II, silversmiths. Rundell & Bridge, retailer. London, England, 1802-1807. Gilt silver. Image courtesy, Royal Collection Trust.



Figure 11 Plate 41 from Vivant Denon's *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte*. At the center top of the plate is a representation of Wadjet as the eye of Ra that may have been the inspiration for the serpent figure. Image courtesy, Getty Research Institute.



Figure 12 Depiction of the god *Re* across the lintel of a pylon gate at Karnak Temple, Luxor, Egypt. Image, author's own.

In addition to the silver items of the service was also a gilt bronze incense burner in the Egyptian-style (fig. 13). Like some of the larger silver items, its design goes beyond the relatively simple inclusion of Egyptian-style masks or sphinxes. At the top of the burner is featured a conopic jar as a finial. Four winged figures with Egyptian masks and Greco-Roman dress support the burner, while underneath is a representation of the *Apis* bull, a late-period Egyptian god, standing on top of an altar with an image of the *kheper* beetle on its side.⁵⁶ The base, as well as a band around the side of the burner, features characters and markings from the zodiac which may have been inspired by the

⁵⁶ Wilkinson, 171, 230.

Dendera zodiac (fig. 14). The Dendera zodiac was a bas-relief carving taken from the chapel dedicated to Osiris in the Hathor temple at Dendera, which was illustrated by Vivant Denon.⁵⁷



Figure 13 Incense burner with cover. Rundell & Bridge, retailer. 1810-1811. Gilt bronze. Image courtesy, Royal Collection Trust.

⁵⁷ Fritze, 177.



Figure 14 The Dendera Zodiac as illustrated by Vivant Denon in the *Description de l'Egypte*. Image courtesy New York Public Library, Rare Book Division

Many of the Egyptian-style items in the Grand Service were reproduced, some with slight variations, for a number of other members of Rundell & Bridge's wealthy clientele.⁵⁸ In terms of production, it was fairly common practice for customers to commission silver that was similar in design to pieces that they had seen elsewhere; however, in terms of design, silver with any level of Egyptian decoration seemed to be at the edges of popular design. That a person would commission what was essentially a luxury item with what may have been considered to be *avant garde* design spoke not just

⁵⁸ Hartop, *Royal Goldsmiths*, 87.

to the trend-setting abilities of the British monarchy, but also to the growing acceptance of Egyptian-style design.

Outside of the Grand Service and the pieces that it inspired, Rundell & Bridge produced a number of other pieces that incorporated Egyptian-style elements. One of the most impressive in terms of inclusion of Egyptian design elements is a candelabra centerpiece designed by the noted architect and designer Charles Heathcote Tatham, and produced by silversmith Philip Coreman (fig. 15). Like the majority of Egyptian-style silver sold through Rundell & Bridge, much of the decoration was neoclassical; however, both the nozzles and the stem connecting the shallow bowl to the base, were made in the pattern that is seen on the column capitals at a number of Egyptian temples (fig. 16). At the base are three classical-style sphinxes with *nemes* headdresses. Other items of silver with Egyptian details retailed through Rundell & Bridge included salts, tea urns, candelabras, wine coolers, and fruit baskets.



Figure 15 Candelabrum Centerpiece. Philip Cornman, silversmith. Charles Heathcote Tatham, designer. Rundell & Bridge, retailer. London, England, 1806. Gilt silver. Image courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

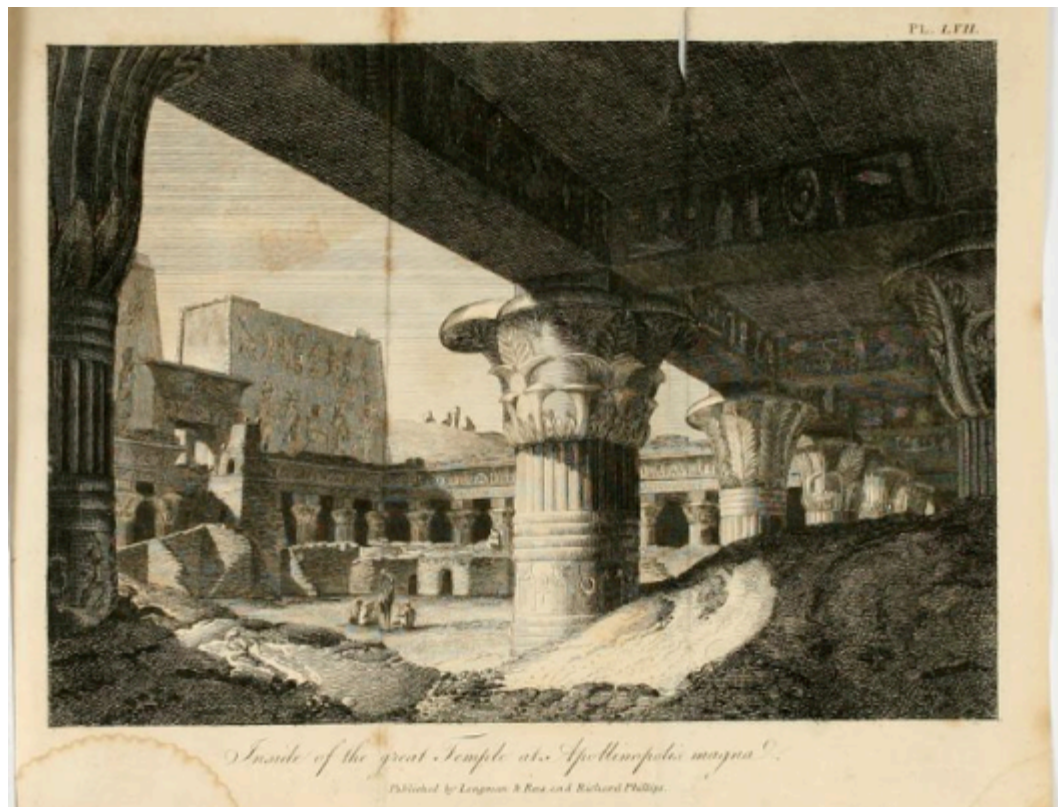


Figure 16 Plate 62 from Vivant Denon's *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte*, depicting the interior of Apollinopolis Magna, now known as Edfu Temple. Image courtesy, Getty Research Institute.

Many of the silversmiths who worked with Rundell & Bridge also made pieces with Egyptian-style motifs outside of the partnership. Many of their pieces were similar in design to pieces produced for Rundell & Bridge, seemingly having been based on designs by Boileau and Tatham. These pieces include items such as a basket centerpiece by silversmith Paul Storr with winged Greco-Roman sphinxes bearing *nemes* headdresses forming the base (fig.17) and salts made by silversmiths Digby Scott and Benjamin Smith II that feature winged masks with *nemes* headdresses (fig.18). While pieces such as these

were produced without the “prestige” of having been purchased from Rundell & Bridge, they were still produced for wealthy clientele.



Figure 17 Centerpiece. Paul Storr, silversmith. London, England, 1820. Sterling silver. Image courtesy, Christies.



Figure 18 Salt. Digby Scott and Benjamin Smith II, silversmiths. London, England, 1806. Gilt Silver. Victoria & Albert Museum.

Overall, the breadth and reach of English Egyptian-style silver was limited. Although French-style silver was popular, the utilization of Egyptian motifs in its design seems to have been limited to the sphere of influence surrounding Rundell & Bridge. In part, this may have been caused by the growing fashion for ancient Egyptian art among the wealthy, but it is also likely caused by Jean-Jacques Boileau and Charles Heathcote Tatham, designers employed by Rundell & Bridge, who brought with them French empire design, and the influence of Thomas Hope.

The scope of Egyptian forms and motifs utilized in designs was also limited. For the most part, between 1800 and 1820, Egyptian elements in silver design were limited to the decoration of a piece, and not the form itself. While there was always the occasional design which was outside the norm, motifs most commonly utilized were sphinxes, masks with *nemes* headdresses, and winged sun-disks.

Later in the nineteenth century, as interaction with Egypt increased and the scientific study of ancient Egypt was established, Egyptian-style design in silver would also begin to change. Through the middle and late nineteenth century, Egyptian-style designs would occasionally appear, but its rarity, as compared to the first quarter of the century, suggests that it largely fallen out of fashion. However, in the American silver industry, Egyptian-style design was firmly established as one of the many design styles available, especially through the end of the century.

CHAPTER FIVE

Egyptian ornament is so full of forms which have interesting significance that I cannot forbear giving one other illustration; and of this I am sure, that not only does a knowledge of the intention of each form employed in a decorative scheme cause the beholder to receive a special amount of pleasure when viewing it, but also that without such knowledge no one can rightly judge of the nature of any ornamental work.

-- Christopher Dresser, *Principles of Decorative Design*

Oft-cited events given as the spark that ignited the desire for Egyptian style pieces, such as the opening of the Suez Canal or the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, discount the prevalent existence of Egyptomania in American society that had prompted the emergence of other Egyptian-style artwork in various mediums, as well as post-dating the creation of many Egyptian-style silver designs created by American silver manufacturing companies. With the lack of clear documentation that concretely creates a connection between the events and specific silver designs, it is more likely that these well-publicized events increased the interest and widened the audience for Egyptian-style silver. These events served as a catalyst, encouraging American silver manufacturers to produce a greater number of articles in the Egyptian-style as a response to their assessment of what the market would support.

The Egyptian-style designs were created based upon Egyptian design motifs found in the art and architecture of ancient Egypt as it was illustrated in the many books published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries now accessible to American

designers. It is important to note that the Egyptian forms and ornamental motifs were almost never utilized without a considerable amount of artistic interpretation on the part of the designers. In that sense, the late nineteenth century represented more a revival of the “idea” of Egypt, rather than a revival of ancient Egyptian design. In many ways, the Egyptian-style designs which appeared in silver during the second half of the century were much more an outward expression of a general interest in ancient Egypt.

Even with the perceived increase of Egyptian-style silver designs in the late part of the century, the number of specific design motifs was still relatively small when compared to other popular designs that were produced during that period. As stated by Patrick Connor “...it is possible to identify certain periods of popular interest in Egypt, but it is not clear that these necessarily coincided with the periods in which the leading designers and connoisseurs were most concerned with the Egyptian style.”

It is easy to determine that Egypt held a steady popular interest during the nineteenth century as demonstrated by an increasing number of new publications. These detailed both the architecture and material culture of ancient Egypt, and many became very popular. *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837) by John Gardner Wilkinson was one such source, considered at the time to be one of the preeminent travel guides for Egypt. Through the publication of multiple editions, Wilkinson made images of ancient Egypt available to a worldwide audience. *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* was also one of the first publications to consider the material culture of ancient

Egypt and present it to a popular audience.⁵⁹ It should be noted, however, that in emerging Egyptological circles the book's scholarly information was considered obsolete by the early 1860s, although its text and illustrations continued to be popular.

Early in the century, interest in Egypt was to be found more often expressed in America through architecture. In the 1830s and 1840s, Egyptian revival architecture became popular across the young United States. Architectural historians theorize that this was an effort to connect the new nation of the United States to an ancient past.⁶⁰ There was a great deal of discussion about the virtues of ancient Egyptian architecture subsequent to the publication of volumes following the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt. Louisa C. Tuthill's *History of Architecture* (1848) was one of the earliest books published on the subject of architectural history in the United States, and in it the author spends nearly fifty pages discussing the intricacies of ancient Egyptian architecture. At one point Tuthill states, "what sublime emotion fills the mind, when contemplating the structures which may have been revered as antiquities, by the Patriarch Abraham, as he gazed upon them and mourned over the idolatry of Egypt!"⁶¹

Yet, this same enthusiasm for ancient Egypt that sparked the appearance of an Egyptian-style in American architecture, did not seem to spill over into silver or the other decorative arts in the early part of the century. Nor did any of the interest or growing

⁵⁹ Jason Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015).

⁶⁰ Richard G. Carrott, *The Egyptian Revival: Its Sources, Monuments, and Meaning, 1808-1858* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 48.

⁶¹ Louisa C. Tuthill, *History of Architecture, from the Earliest Times; Its Present Condition in Europe and the United States; with a Biography of Eminent Architects, and a Glossary of Architectural Terms* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1848), viii.

excitement generated by any of the hugely popular lecturers, with their collections of mummies and antiquities, stimulate much interest in the use of Egyptian motifs in silver design. There are few known Egyptian-style designs that date prior to 1860, by which time Egyptian revival architecture had largely fallen out of favor.⁶²

In the United States there are just a handful of known silver pieces from the first half of the nineteenth century that exhibit any Egyptian-style decoration or motifs. The majority of the pieces appear to have been produced in the same vein as the Egyptian-style silver that was produced in England at the same time; Egyptian elements selectively chosen and added to a piece with an separate design style, rather than presenting an overall cohesive design that incorporated the elements. These examples include a presentation piece made by silversmith Thomas Fletcher of Philadelphia and retailed by Baldwin Gardiner, which was given to New York City District Attorney Hugh Maxwell by the merchants of New York City in 1829, in celebration of his successful prosecution of corrupt directors of the New York Stock Exchange (fig.19).

⁶² Carrott, 47.



Figure 19 Vase with stand. Thomas Fletcher, silversmith. Baldwin Gardiner, retailer. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States, 1829. Silver. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Much like the English Egyptian-style designs that were being created around the same time, a single Egyptian motif was chosen, and added to what was largely a neoclassical design. The piece was generally based on the famous Warwick Vase, an ancient Roman marble footed vase that was discovered at Hadrian's Villa in 1771. The vase features handles that become grape vines and bands of acanthus leaves around the top and bottom of the bowl of the vase, and at the foot. The stand features mostly classical decoration to match the vase, with a sculptural scroll pattern supporting the center of the vase's foot and claw feet with acanthus leaf decoration; however, on the platform of the base, may be

found three winged Egyptian sphinxes, wearing *nemes* headdresses, supporting the rim of the foot. It is unknown exactly what Fletcher was using as inspiration for his design, but it is possible that he based this piece on work by English silversmith Paul Storr, who had created the Grand Service for George IV.⁶³

Another piece which was not overtly Egyptian but does display a nascent interest in adding Egyptian-style design elements to silver, is a tea and coffee service made by Samuel Kirk & Sons of Baltimore, Maryland (fig. 20).⁶⁴



Figure 20 Tea and Coffee Service. Samuel Kirk & Sons. Baltimore, Maryland, c.1846. Silver and ivory. Dumbarton House/The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, Washington, D.C.

⁶³ See figures 9 and 17 for examples

⁶⁴ It is possible that Kirk designed a greater number of items that incorporated Egyptian elements than just the mentioned pieces. However, the Kirk design drawings, which are housed at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, MD, are currently uncataloged and too fragile to be handled.

The service, which was produced around 1846, consisted of a teapot, coffeepot, cream jug, sugar bowl, and waste bowl. All of the pieces are decorated with repoussé buildings and flowers, in Kirk's "Etruscan" style, with square neoclassical handles. At the terminals of the handles are figures bearing a strong resemblance to images of the Egyptian goddess Hathor, particularly as she is depicted in the Hathor-head columns at various temples in Egypt (fig. 21).



Figure 21 Detail of Hathor figure used on the Kirk tea and coffee service.

These Egyptian motifs, including both the sphinxes on the Fletcher piece and the Hathor figure on the Kirk pieces, were drawn from Egyptian architecture, and are similar to those

seen in the early English Egyptian-style silver. Although it is not currently known where Kirk obtained inspiration for his design, it is known that he utilized the design manual *The Smith and Founder's Director* by Lewis Cottingham. While the book does include two plates with Egyptian-style design, none present a strong match to the figure used by Kirk (fig. 22 and fig.23).



Figure 22 Plate from *The Smith and Founder's Director* that illustrates “Grecian, Roman, and Egyptian Lamps.”
Egyptian designs include the two lamp designs on the bottom-right of the plate.



Figure 23 Plate from *The Smith and Founder's Director* illustrating "Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman ornaments." Egyptian designs include the lotus blossom in the top-right corner, and the sphinxes at the base of the right urn.

Although Kirk worked in the same city as Mendes Cohen, it is unlikely that he was inspired by Cohen's collection of Egyptian antiquities, since the Cohen collection does not contain any depictions of the goddess Hathor in her bovine form.⁶⁵ It is more likely

⁶⁵ This was confirmed through an email conversation with Meg Swaney, a researcher at the Johns Hopkins University Archaeological Museum, where the Cohen collection currently resides. Meg Swaney, e-mail to the author, May 2, 2018.

that Kirk may have had access to a copy of the *Description de l’Egypte*, which does include depictions of Hathor-head columns and sphinxes (fig.24).



Figure 24 A Hathor-head column from the temple at Dendera, as illustrated in the *Description de l’Egypte*. Image courtesy, New York Public Library, Rare Books Division

The lack of Egyptian-style motifs in American silver design during the first half of the century may have been due to the general attitude towards ancient Egyptian art during the period which was thought of as more architectural and thus less desirable for silverware. However, by the second half of the century America was entranced by Owen

Jones' Egyptian Court and manufacturers were rethinking what was possible in Egyptian-style silver design. Owen Jones and Christopher Dresser led American silver manufacturers and designers to explore the possibilities presented by the design reform movement and the expression of Egyptian-style designs in silver.

Egypt was not only popularly believed to be one of the birthplaces of civilization, but its ancient art was considered to be the foundation of all art and architecture.⁶⁶ The guidebook to the 1853 Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, held in New York, was a discussion of the history of 'fine' art which stated that "Egypt and India were the pioneers of civilization. Shelter is the first absolute necessity of a man which can be made the subject of treatment as a Fine Art. Greece followed. Grecian civilization was the flower and refinement of the Egyptian. Its art, naturally, completed the earlier art."⁶⁷

At the turn of the nineteenth century ancient Egyptian art may have been valued for its perceived strangeness in light of Napoleon's invasion, the newness of the scholarship on the subject, and even its ties to Biblical stories; but as the mid-century approached the art of ancient Egypt fell out of favor. However, even as ancient Egyptian art became less popular with designers, general interest and scholarship on the subject of Egyptian civilization continued.

During the 1850s, ancient Egyptian art and design may have been considered passé, but by following decade it started to come back into vogue through the English design reform movement, and subsequent American aesthetic movement. Formally

⁶⁶ B. Sillman, Jr. and C.R. Goodrich, eds. *The World of Science, Art, and Industry Illustrated from Examples in the New-York Exhibition, 1853-54* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Co., 1854), 177.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

introduced to the United States at the 1875 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the tenants of design reform; decoration is secondary to form, form is dictated by the function of the object and the materials used, and design should be derived from historical or non-Western ornament; did have an earlier impact on the American public and on the popularity of ancient Egyptian ornament in American design.

Popularized through books and articles on “household art” such as Charles L. Eastlake’s *Hints on Household Taste* (1868), aestheticism spread, especially its emphasis on historic and non-Western design. In both the upper and middle classes, it became “good taste” to have furnishings, decorative objects, and interiors that reflected a wide array of historic and geographical influences, and authors such as Eastlake stressed that large expenditures were not required to achieve an artistic household. As one author stated, “good taste was not an ostentatious display of wealth; it was an educated knowledge of art principles and of historical precedent.”⁶⁸

As part of the American aesthetic movement, ancient Egyptian art gained renewed popularity. Everything from furniture to wallpaper was produced with ancient Egyptian motifs, and entire rooms were decorated in the style. One such room was described in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*:

“Opening out of this room is an Egyptian retreat, with the lotus, the scarabaeus, and the procession of slaves, huntsman, and animals in the strange but expressive drawing with which Brugsch’s book has made us familiar. It would be in vain to describe the hawk-headed goddess, the dog-faced deities of Egypt, the inscrutable eye of the high-priest as he presides of the fire-place. This room is devoted to consultations on the mysterious

⁶⁸ Martha Crabill McClagherty, “Household Art: Creating the Artistic Home, 1868-1893,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 2.

diseases of the brain, and is fitly dedicated to that subtle Egyptian intellect which saw so clearly behind the veil and read as no other people have read the enigma of life.”⁶⁹

While earlier publications such as the *Description de l’Egypte* continued to be influential, new publications made Egyptian design more accessible. With the new emphasis on historical and non-Western design, archaeologically correct ancient Egyptian motifs were incorporated into design manuals. In 1856, Owen Jones, a leading voice in the design reform movement, published the seminal design manual, the *Grammar of Ornament*, which was found in the design libraries of most American silver manufacturers during the nineteenth century. Nineteen of the twenty chapters of his book focused on historical and geographical examples of ornamental design, with Egyptian design as the second chapter.⁷⁰ In the introduction to the chapter, Jones stated in regard to Egyptian art “In all other styles we can trace a rapid ascent from infancy, founded on some bygone style, to a culminating point of slow, lingering decline, feeding on its own elements. In the Egyptian we have no traces of infancy or of any foreign influence; and we must, therefore, believe that they went for inspiration direct from nature.”⁷¹

The Egyptian-style designs featured by Jones focused less on the architectural elements of design, as had so many other publications, and more on the decorative elements and ornamentation. Jones’ work and the *Grammar of Ornament* were clearly

⁶⁹ The article refers to German Egyptologist Heinrich Karl Brugsch, who wrote several popular works on ancient Egyptian history, art, and architecture through the 1870s.

“Certain New York Houses,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 1882, 683.

⁷⁰ Jones visited Egypt between 1832 and 1834 while on his Grand Tour. A number of his watercolors of ancient Egyptian monuments were later published in *Views on the Nile from Cairo to the Second Cataract* by George Moore.

⁷¹ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, Reprint (New York: Portland House, 1986), 22.

influential in England, as was the work of Christopher Dresser, another proponent of design reform. Their work seems to have been especially influential in English silver design. Egyptian-style ornament, which appears to have fallen out of favor in England by the early 1820s reappeared in English silver design during the 1860s. In this iteration, English Egyptian-style silver design featured a much heavier use of Egyptian ornamentation and even use of Egyptian ceramic and utensil forms, which created much more exotic-looking designs (fig. 25). It would become influential in American Egyptian-style silver as well, but the elements would be combined in a distinctly American sense of design.



Figure 25 Candelabrum (one of a pair). Frederick Elkington & Co., 1872. England. Gold plated base metal. Dallas Museum of Art.

It is also possible that the English design reform movement, of which the *Grammar of Ornament* was a seminal publication, influenced American silver design through the employment of foreign-trained designers and workmen at the American silver manufacturing companies. One such man, English-born and trained designer

George Wilkinson, spent most of his career at the Gorham Manufacturing Company, and was responsible for many of their Egyptian-style designs.⁷²

Owen Jones and other reform movement proponents, such as Christopher Dresser, were great admirers of Egyptian-style ornament. Dresser, in his publication *Principles of Decorative Design*, states that in Egyptian ornamentation "...there is a severity, a rigidity of line, a sort of sternness about it...But mark! With this severity there is always coupled an amount of dignity, and in some cases this dignity is very apparent. Length of line, firmness of drawing, severity of form, and subtlety of curve are the great characteristics of Egyptian ornamentation."⁷³ Dresser goes on to state that there is "power and dignity mingled with severity in every ornamental form which they produced."⁷⁴

Silver design was not left untouched in the movement towards a more "artistic" environment. In *Hints on Household Taste*, Eastlake decried silver design of the 1850s stating, "...a large proportion of modern plate is simply cast, and cast, too, in patterns which have no more artistic quality than the ornaments of a wedding cake...People buy them because there is nothing else of the kind to be had; but there is no more *art* in their design than there is in that of a modern bed-post."⁷⁵ In a case of demand and supply, American silver manufacturers embraced the eclectic style that was promoted through the

⁷² Charles L. Venable, *Silver in America 1840-1940* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1994), 64.

⁷³ Christopher Dresser, *Principles of Decorative Design* (London: Cassell, Petter, & Galpin, 1873), 5.

⁷⁴ Dresser, 6.

⁷⁵ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 286–87.

idea of “good taste,” and the qualities expressed in Jones’ and Dresser’s remarks on Egyptian design can be seen reflected in the American Egyptian-style silver designs.

Solid Silver

While the American designs are imaginative, they are rarely fanciful, and usually seem to convey some level of severity. Unlike the English Egyptian-style silver that was being produced at the same period, and which utilized a heavy amount of Egyptian ornamentation, its American counterparts utilized not just Egyptian forms and ornamentation, but also ornamentation from a wide range of periods. Pieces such as a centerpiece produced by the Gorham Manufacturing Company, in the form of an ancient Egyptian boat, convey the power and dignity ascribed to Egyptian art by Dresser (fig.26).



Figure 26 Centerpiece. Gorham Manufacturing Company. Providence, Rhode Island, 1871. Silver. Sothebys.

Unlike many American Egyptian-style silver pieces, the form of the centerpiece is based upon the form of an actual ancient Egyptian boat, with its long, narrow shape and lotus blossom at the bow. It is likely that inspiration for the design came from an illustration in the *Grammar of Ornament* (fig. 27), or George Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (fig. 28), both of which include illustrations of Egyptian boats.



Figure 27 Plate V from Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*, which illustrates various types of fans, headdresses, lotuses, vases in the form of lotuses, and oars. At the bottom of the plate are illustrations of two boats, the bottom of which is similar in form to the Gorham centerpiece. At each end of the boat, are lotus blossoms, which is the same placement as in the centerpiece.

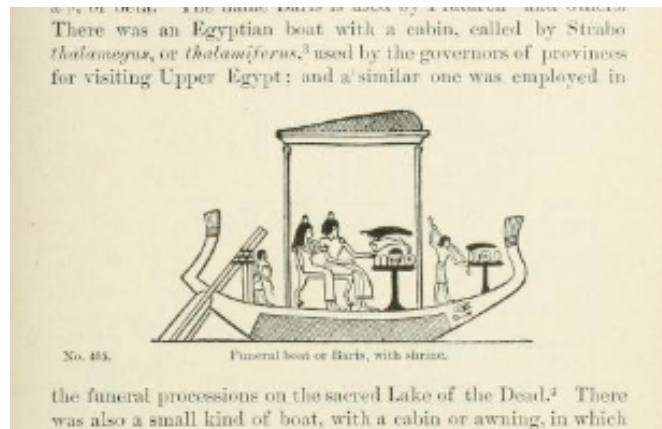


Figure 28 Illustration from George Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, depicting a funeral barge.

Unlike other styles of ornamentation popular during this period of eclectic design in the nineteenth century, the piece lacks excessive ornamentation. Rather, the body of the boat is ornamented with die-rolled geometric decoration, similar to that which is illustrated in the *Grammar of Ornament* (fig.29 and fig. 30).



Figure 29 Detail of the die rolled borders on the body of the centerpiece



Figure 30 Plate VIII from the *Grammar of Ornament*, illustrating ornamentation from ancient Egyptian wall paintings

The only other ornamentation on the piece is the handle, which mirrors depictions of papyrus plants (fig. 31), which the thin stalks forming the handle, and the stylized representation of the blossoming papyrus bulb forming the attachment to the body.⁷⁶ The handle itself is surmounted by a hawk with outstretched wings which stands on a sphere. The hawk is a modified version of the hawk that was used to represent the god Horus.

⁷⁶ The inclusion of papyrus blooms in the boat as well as on the handle may also be derived from the type of boat. In both the *Grammar of Ornament* and *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, the boat depicted is a papyrus skiff, which is made from bundled papyrus plants.



Figure 31 Plate IV from the *Grammar of Ornament*, which shows illustrations of papyrus and lotus plants. The illustration in the top-left corner is very similar to the design of the handle on the Gorham centerpiece.

The majority of Egyptian-style designs produced by American silver manufacturers were not as committed to the utilization of both Egyptian forms and ornamentation. Many pieces, such as those included in a tea and coffee set manufactured by J.E. Caldwell, utilized forms that did not exist in ancient Egyptian design (fig. 32).



Figure 32 Tea and Coffee Service. J.E. Caldwell & Company, manufacturer. Philadelphia, c.1875. Silver. Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Rather, Egyptian design only formed part of the ornamentation, and was often combined with ornamentation from other design styles, including neoclassical or renaissance revival. The hot water urn from the Caldwell service illustrates this point (fig. 33).



Figure 33 Hot Water Urn from the J.E. Caldwell service

It features a die-rolled band in a lozenge pattern around the lid, Egyptian-style masks with serpents on the handles, a kneeling female figure wearing a *nemes* headdress, winged outstretched arms as the spigot, and hawk figures surround the burner. However, the lid of the urn has a Renaissance revival lion holding a shield in its paws as a finial, surrounded by scrolling foliage, and the body of the hot water urn featured a Greek egg-and-dart pattern at the point where the handles attach to the body, a die-rolled Greco-Roman acanthus leaf pattern around the base, and a reserve in the center of the body featuring a Rococo-style cherub figure surrounded by a scrolling acanthus leaf motif.

Electroplate

Just as the craze for exotic interior design reached all levels of society, so too did the desire to own silver. Electroplate, produced by having a thin layer of silver deposited on the surface of a cheaper base metal, created an item that looked like solid silver, but cost a fraction of the price. Because of the lower price point, a much wider section of society could afford to purchase it; however, even when produced at a mass-market level, Egyptian-style designs in electroplate continued to account for a relatively small percent of the total designs available in the medium.

Like the solid silver designs, Egyptian-style designs began to appear in electroplate manufacturers' catalogs in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Following the lead of the designs produced in solid silver, there was a wide range in the amount of Egyptian elements included in designs. Pieces such as a Rogers, Smith & Company tilting ice water pitcher (fig. 34) or a jewel casket by Reed & Barton (fig. 35) relied heavily upon Egyptian design and ornament. Other pieces merely included elements such as sphinxes, lions, or Egyptian masks on a piece that was otherwise largely unidentifiable as Egyptian (fig. 36).



Figure 34 Tilting ice-water pitcher. Rogers, Smith & Co., manufacturer, c.1869. Silver electroplate. Private Collection. Image courtesy SFO Museum.

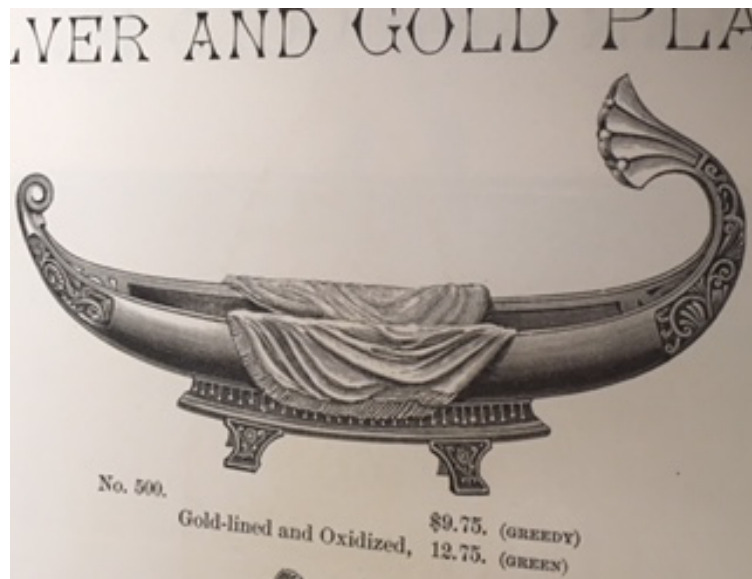


Figure 35 Design for a jewel casket in the form of an ancient Egyptian boat, from Reed & Barton's 1885 silver and gold plate catalog



Figure 36 Design for a tureen with a sphinx-like lion as a finial, from Reed & Barton's 1877 catalog

Just as there was an explosion of design styles in the second half of the nineteenth century, so too was there also an increase of new forms that were available. Egyptian motifs could be found on everything from ice water pitchers, to smaller items such as napkin rings (fig. 37) and salt and pepper casters (fig. 38). In the 1880s, electroplated vases and flower stands with fully-formed Egyptian figures also became popular (fig. 39).



Figure 37 Design for a napkin ring from Reed & Barton's 1885 catalog



Figure 38 Design for a salt or pepper caster Reed & Barton's 1885 catalog



Figure 39 Designs for flower stands illustrated in Reed & Barton's 1885 catalog

Electroplate was a much more market-driven product than solid silver, since it was not commissioned and items were produced on a relatively large scale. It is thus unlikely that an electroplate manufacturing company would produce a design or form unless there was demand for it. Clearly such a demand for Egyptian-style pieces in electroplate existed; however, the demand appears to have been relatively low. In a survey of nearly thirty years of trade catalogs from large and small electroplate manufacturers, Egyptian-style elements or designs do not seem to appear more than a handful of times, and do not appear at all in mail-order catalogs such as Sears, Roebuck & Co. and Montgomery Wards. Rather, the prevalent decoration and design styles were

Japanese-influenced asymmetrical decoration, naturalism, floral repoussé, renaissance revival, rococo revival, and engine-turned decoration.

While the inclusion of Egyptian-style designs in electroplate does indicate that there was a demand for the style amongst the middle class and those that sought a more affordable alternative to solid silver, the demand for the Egyptian-style seems to have been much higher amongst the wealthy who could afford to commission solid silver pieces.

Flatware

Egyptian-style flatware ranged from highly ornamental pieces that clearly featured Egyptian motifs, to patterns that were given a name evocative of the ancient civilization, but had no visual connection to ancient Egypt. Flatware in the modern sense, which embraces sets of forks, spoons, knives, and other “flat” tableware, did not exist in ancient Egypt; however, in ancient Egypt there were various types of spoons and knives, many of which were illustrated in *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*. Like hollowware, silver designers rarely reproduced the ancient examples or even used them as inspiration.

One of the first Egyptian-style patterns was the Gorham Manufacturing Company’s *Egyptian* pattern, which was also known as *Sphinx* (fig. 40). Introduced in 1869 and produced in sterling silver, this pattern featured a thin, round handle with a bust wearing a *nemes* headdress at the terminal, and a small figure of the god Horus in his falcon form, with his wings outstretched (fig. 41).



Figure 40 A variety of serving spoons in Gorham's *Egyptian* pattern. Image courtesy Sotheby's.



Figure 41 Detail of Egyptian bust on Gorham's *Egyptian* pattern

The handle itself is comprised of three stems of ivy, bound at top and bottom, and terminating at the handle join with three five-lobed ivy leaves.⁷⁷ While this was a wholly new design, it is possible that inspiration for the thin, round handle and bound ivy stems was taken from illustrations in *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, which depicts spoons and ladles with long thin handles, as well as spoons with striated banding on the handles, which is reminiscent of the banded bindings represented in the *Egyptian* pattern (fig. 42).

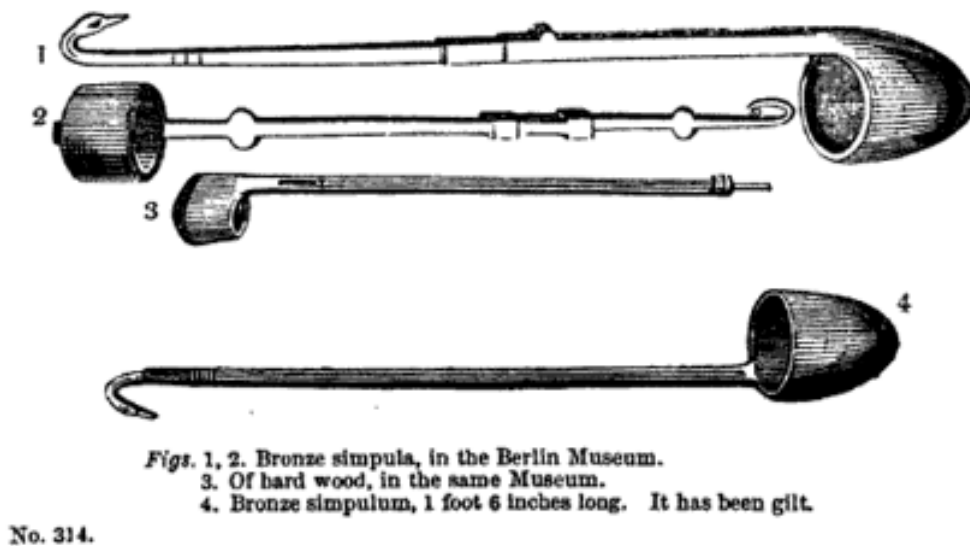


Figure 42 Illustration from *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* depicting various examples of ladles from ancient Egypt

⁷⁷ Eight days previous to the launch of *Egyptian*, Gorham released a pattern commonly known as *Ivy*, but in Gorham records officially known as *Egyptian Ivy*. The pattern has no identifiable ancient Egyptian motifs or characteristics, beyond the thin, round handle also seen in *Egyptian*. William P. Hood Jr., John R. Olson, and Charles S. Curb, "American Silver Flatware in the Egyptian Revival Style, Part One," *Silver Magazine* 35, no. May/June (2003): 19.

A number of smaller silver manufacturers released Egyptian-style flatware patterns, which were quite similar to Gorham's *Egyptian* pattern. Around 1870, Whiting Manufacturing Company released a pattern, also called *Egyptian*, which featured a die-stamped handle. The decoration on the terminal incorporated an elongated reserve surmounted by an Egyptian mask, with papyrus bulbs at the base, whose stems were incorporated into the length of the handle. Sometime between 1870 and 1875, Duhme & Company of Cincinnati, Ohio released two similar patterns with Egyptian bust terminals.⁷⁸ Like Gorham's *Egyptian*, their main features were a thin, round handle that terminated in an Egyptian bust; however, while the bust in Gorham's design wore the *nemes* headdress, the Duhme & Company designs are much more evocative of the queenly vulture headdress, worn over a wig. Other companies that produced similar designs include Albert Coles, Ford & Tupper, and Wood & Hughes, all from New York City, as well as Krider & Biddle of Philadelphia.

In March 1869, Gorham released a second Egyptian-style pattern, *Lotus* (fig. 43).⁷⁹ Similar to the *Egyptian* pattern, *Lotus* featured a thin round handle representing three lotus stalks bound together through the center of the handle, which terminated in a spray of three lotus blossoms. At the handle join, the three stalks separate, with the

⁷⁸ The official names for these patterns is unknown, although Hood, Olson, and Curb refer to them as *Pharaoh's Head, One* and *Pharaoh's Head, Two*.

⁷⁹ Whiting Manufacturing Company produced a remarkably similar pattern, commonly referred to as *Lotus*, although its designer, release date, and official pattern name are unknown, and no catalogs are known to exist that illustrate the pattern. This pattern also features handles comprised of bound lotus stalks, although it terminates in five lotus blooms rather than three.

middle stalk terminating in the inverted base of a lotus blossom.⁸⁰ The concept for the handle design may have come from an illustration in the *Grammar of Ornament* that depicts three papyrus stalks held together, with their heads arranged in a similar fashion to the terminals of the *Lotus* pattern (fig. 44).



Figure 43 Ladle in Gorham's *Lotus* pattern. Yale University Art Gallery.

⁸⁰ In their study of Egyptian revival flatware published in *Silver Magazine*, William P. Hood Jr., John R. Olson, and Charles S. Curb note that some on some pieces produced in the *Lotus* pattern, the functional ends of the pieces were embossed or engraved with anthemion, an ancient Greek decorative motif, Egyptian-style lotus buds, or ivy leaves.



Figure 44 Plate IV from Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*. The top-left illustration shows papyrus plants bundled together in a similar manner to what is seen in the *Lotus* pattern

Gorham released a third Egyptian-style pattern, commonly referred to as *Seated Egyptian Figures*, at some point between 1865 and 1870, the design of which has been attributed to George Wilkinson (fig. 45). Like their *Egyptian* and *Lotus* patterns, this pattern featured a thin, round handle. Although, in this case it is largely unadorned, except for a disk placed near the top of the handle, and two seated Egyptian figures positioned on each side of the handle near the handle join. Charles Venable has referred

to these figures at *shabti* figures, which were small, usually mummiform, figures placed in tombs; however, figures in the pattern are stylistically much more similar to block-statues, which depict a seated figure with their legs drawn up to the chest and the arms crossed over the knees (fig. 46).⁸¹ Unlike *Egyptian* and *Lotus*, which were both produced in a fairly extensive range of forks, spoons, and serving utensils, this pattern seems to have been limited to ladles in a variety of sizes and some serving spoons.⁸²



Figure 45 Olive spoon in Gorham's *Seated Egyptian Figures* pattern. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Bayou Bend Collection.

⁸¹ Block-statues were not illustrated in either *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* or the *Grammar of Ornament*. However, several of the statues were acquired by the British Museum through the purchase of Henry Salt's collection of Egyptian antiquities in 1829.

⁸² William P. Hood Jr., John R. Olson, and Charles S. Curb, "American Silver Flatware in the Egyptian Revival Style, Part Two," *Silver Magazine* 35, no. July/August (2003): 26.



Figure 46 Block-statue of Sennefer. Thebes, Egypt, Dynasty 18. Granodiorite. British Museum.

In 1870, Gorham released a fourth Egyptian-style flatware pattern, *Isis*, which by some accounts was their most exuberant and successful Egyptian-style design (fig. 29). Although named after the Egyptian goddess, the design had little in relation to the figure. The *Isis* pattern featured the thin, round handle that was used on all of Gorham's Egyptian-style designs, a hollow rectangular terminal with a capped finial, and at the handle join, a modified representation of the god Re, with outstretched wings and a three-dimensional serpent at the center. Many pieces in the *Isis* pattern featured pierced work in patterns of lotus blossoms. Produced in a wide range of forks, spoons, knives, and serving

utensils, the *Isis* pattern proved to be successful enough that it was incorporated into hollowware designs for pieces including salts, sugar bowls, and cream jugs.

Although Gorham Manufacturing Company seems to have been the leading producer of Egyptian-style flatware designs, a number of other, smaller manufacturers also incorporated Egyptian motifs into their designs.⁸³ As in hollowware, Egyptian-style design seems to have been on the fringe of popular design, and makes up only a small percentage of the many flatware patterns that existed through the second half of the nineteenth century. Unlike hollowware, in which Egyptian-style motifs extended through solid silver and electroplate designs, Egyptian-style flatware seems to have been largely limited to designs in sterling silver. This may have been in part due to the relatively limited demand for the style.

⁸³ Many of these patterns have been disassociated from their manufacturer.

CHAPTER SIX

The riddle has now been solved. Many questions are still unanswered, but the essential elements of Egyptian life and thought have been laid open. We now know what were the great epochs in the history of this land. We know what were the teachings, what the ritual, what the fundamental ideas of the religion of Egypt. We know the story of its monumental art, and the three purposes to which that art was limited, to adorn the worship of the gods, to glorify the king, to express reverence for the dead.

--Martin Brimmer and Minna Timmins Chapman, *Egypt: Three essays on the history, religion and art of ancient Egypt*

Egyptian-style design has had a long history; it has almost been as misunderstood as the history of the discovery and exploration of the land by which it was inspired. The nineteenth century was truly the beginning of the age of exploration in Egypt. It became a place not just for the financial and intellectual elite. This mentality was reflected in the silver designs. Most have been content to explain American Egyptian-style silver as the result of a few highly publicized events, but in reality, it was the result of a worldview which was expanding in America during the nineteenth century. It is unlikely that a small collection of events would have caused the manufacture of Egyptian-style design in silver to the extent it achieved without the knowledge that the designs would be profitable for the producers.

A fitting symbol of the Egyptian-style in American silver is a piece created in 1893, by Tiffany & Company (fig. 47). The company produced a coffeepot for display at

the World's Columbian Exposition, held that year in Chicago. Designed by Edward C. Moore, the coffeepot was the culmination of nineteenth century American Egyptian-style silver design. It combined designs from multiple historic periods and cultures in its form, which was a fusion of Egyptian and Near Eastern or "Saracenic" design. It was colorful, with the addition of enamels that emphasized the lozenge patterns, designed to reflect what would have been painted on the columns of ancient Egyptian temples which the form of the coffeepot reflected. In an era which valued design that was eclectic and exotic, it exuded both. It was one of the last showstopper silver pieces produced in the nineteenth century in the Egyptian-style.



Figure 47 Coffeepot, Tiffany & Co., maker, New York, NY, 1893. Silver with enamel decoration, ivory, and jade. Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA.

The nineteenth century was by no means the end of the interest in Egypt by Americans. By the turn of the twentieth century, Egyptomania was building to a fever pitch. In 1919, James Henry Breasted founded the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, and with its founding, American Egyptology was established. And in 1922, the most famous Egyptian archaeological discovery in popular culture was revealed by Howard Carter who found the tomb of the pharaoh Tutankhamun.

Ancient Egypt has provided artistic inspiration for thousands of years. Like many design styles, its popularity has peaked and waned, and constantly reinvented itself in the minds of creative designers.

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